



The Omni San Diego Hotel in the city's historic Gaslamp Quarter held a grand re-opening ceremony on August 28 following a multi-million dollar renovation. In a nod to its partnership with Petco Park, the hotel's celebration was a baseball-inspired event that featured the San Diego Padre's Friar mascot (center). Pictured from left to right: Kurt Alexander, President at Omni Hotels & Resorts; Charles Cho, General Manager, Omni San Diego Hotel; Julie Coker & President and CEO, San Diego Tourism Authority; Lee Neibart, Chairman and Sr. Partner, Trinity Investments.

Details Released About Proposed NYC Casino-Hotel Project

By Jordan Bradley

The developers behind a proposed \$12 billion casino-hotel in New York City's Hudson Yards neighborhood, Related Companies and Wynn Resorts, have released new details about their joint proposal as they vie for one of three new gaming licenses in the city.

The development would be comprised of the Wynn New York City, a casino resort, a 5.6-acre public park at the center of the development, 1,500 new housing units that include 324 affordable apartments, and a new public kindergarten through eighth grade school.

"We truly believe it will be an oasis that becomes the new calling card of the neighborhood. In the months ahead, we look forward to sharing more details of the extensive, long-term economic and community benefits our vision for Hudson Yards and Wynn New York City will bring to New York," said Jeff T. Blau, CEO of Related Companies.

Please turn to page 3

Oklahoma City Voters Approve Hotel Occupancy Tax Hike

By Jordan Bradley

Voters in an August 27 primary election in Oklahoma City approved a 3.75% increase in the city's hotel occupancy tax rate.

The measure was passed by 66% of approximately 32,000 voters and will go into effect October 1. The occupancy rate applies to hotels, motels, and "home-sharing" properties such as Airbnb or Vrbo listings, according to the Oklahoma City official webpage.

The increased funds from the tax will increase advertising and mar-

keting efforts to bring more visitors to the city; support large events and festivals in Oklahoma City; and improve the Oklahoma City Fairgrounds and Oklahoma City Convention Center venues, which annually hold national and international equine, sporting events and conventions.

"This is a big victory for our city. By giving us the resources to compete—without taxing our residents—this solidifies our status as a tourist destination," said Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt. "Those visitors fuel our economy and help fund our core city

services. This result also illustrates why I call us the most mission-focused city in America. Our voters' commitment to progress remains strong. We continue to do what it takes to remain a top 20 city."

Proponents of the tax increase note that Oklahoma City, prior to the rate hike, was falling behind peer cities such as Memphis and San Antonio.

The tax increase—which brings the hotel tax up to 9.25% per night from 5.5%—is projected to rake in an additional \$11.6 million per fiscal year.

Please turn to page 2

Health Dept. Will Not Appeal Hospital Association Victory in Online Tracking Case

By Todd McElwee

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is celebrating a judicial victory over the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which has said it won't appeal the ruling.

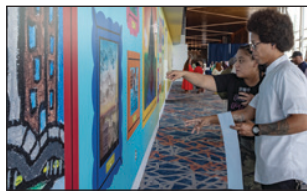
The case involves a rule adopted in guidance by HHS' Office for Civil Rights (OCR) titled "Use of Online Tracking Technologies by HIPAA Covered Entities and Business Associates," which AHA said prevented hospitals and health sys-

tems from using standard third-party web technologies to capture IP addresses on key portions of their public-facing webpages.

AHA General Counsel Chad Golder said: "The American Hospital Association is pleased that the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has decided not to appeal the district court's decision vacating the new rule adopted in its Online Tracking Technologies Bulletin. As the AHA repeatedly explained to OCR—both be-

Please turn to page 3

Inside



Page 3

Page 2
Music City Center Awards Contract for Expansion Feasibility Study

Page 4
10,000 Hotel Workers Strike Over Labor Day Weekend

Page 5
PCMA Announces 2025 Directors and Trustees Slate

Page 6
IMEX America's Learning Program Goes Live

Portland Airport Debuts Revamped, Nature-Infused Terminal

By Jonathan Trager

The \$2.15 billion renovation of the Portland International Airport (PDX) has taken off.

The airport in mid-August opened the revamped main terminal, which features an outdoors identity. The area is not only filled with trees, plants, natural light, and a wooden ceiling, it will also continue having appearances by "therapy" llamas and alpacas at times.

"The new terminal also uses biophilic design—bring-

ing in the natural world—to harness its benefits like lowering travelers' stress, blood pressure, and heart rate and make it feel like a stroll through a Pacific Northwest forest," according to the Port of Portland, which owns PDX.

Among the 72 large trees throughout the terminal are black walnut, ficus, and olive varieties. The area also offers 5,000 live plants.

The Port of Portland is emphasizing the energy-efficient and locally-sourced

Please turn to page 5

NEWS

Hotel Associations Celebrate National Hotel Employee Appreciation Day

By Jordan Bradley

Several major hotel associations celebrated National Hotel Employee Association Day on September 1 with social media shout-outs.

In a joint statement, the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA), the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers (NABHOOD) and the Latino Hotel Association (LHA) acknowledged the day's importance throughout the weekend.

"The nearly two million people employed by America's hotels are the heart and soul of this industry. Their talent and drive create memorable visits for millions of guests every year," said Kevin Care, Interim President of AHLA. "This National Hotel Employee Day, we thank them for their service and encourage others to explore a career in our vibrant and growing industry."

Working with the National Day Calendar, an organization dedicated to declaring and tracking national days of recognition, the AHLA established National Hotel Employee Day in 2022.

The hotel industry employs almost two million hotel workers throughout the United States, according to the AHLA.

"We put a high value on the professionals who make this industry thrive day-in and day-out, and we hope everyone finds time to thank the hotel employees that create warm,

welcoming stays all around the country," said Andy Ingraham, President, CEO and Founder of NABHOOD. "Our industry only succeeds when our staff succeeds."

At least half of those employees work at AAHOA-member hotels.

"AAHOA members are proud to employ over one million dedicated individuals across the nation, who are the driving force of the hospitality industry," said Miraj S. Patel, Chairman of AAHOA. "The hoteliers we represent know firsthand that this industry only succeeds because of the commitment of staff who work directly with guests. Today and every day, we honor their unwavering commitment to excellence, their role in creating unforgettable guest experiences, and their significant contributions to our communities."

Lynette Montoya, President and CEO of LHA said: "At the heart of hospitality are people who care, and we're so glad to work with so many warmhearted professionals who have made a career in our industry. On this third annual National Hotel Employee Day, let's take a moment to appreciate the hard work hotel employees do every day."

Landmark Resort Door County in Egg Harbor, Wisconsin, shared a post acknowledging all of the hard work the resort's employees put into the property and calling out good works from every department.

"Every single one of our team members is an integral part of the resort—



The Best Western Plus Hotel & Conference Center in Baltimore, Maryland, shared its thanks for its employees with a celebration on September 3.

we couldn't be here without them, and we appreciate their hard work, great hospitality, and their smiles!" the resort said in the post.

In response to the post, several guests of the resort shared encouraging comments, and one poster called out a specific employee for an instance that turned their stay around for the better.

The restaurant side of the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel in Raleigh, North Carolina, Jimmy V's Osteria + Bar, also shared their thanks for the hotel's employees via social media.

"We at [Jimmy V's] & [Sheraton Raleigh Hotel] could not be more grateful for all our wonderful employees who

help make it all happen," the post said. "To everyone who works in hospitality, and in our home away from home, thank you so much for everything you do!"

The Best Western Plus Hotel & Conference Center in Baltimore, Maryland, shared a photo of their employees, thanking them for their hard work.

"Today, we celebrate the amazing team that makes every guest experience exceptional," the hotel said in the post. "Your hard work, dedication, and passion truly set us apart. We're so grateful for each and every one of you! Thank you for everything you do to make our hotel a wonderful place to stay. You are the best!"

Music City Center Awards Contract for Expansion Feasibility Study

By Jonathan Trager

Charles Starks, President & CEO of Nashville's Music City Center, announced on September 5 that it has awarded a five-year contract for a feasibility study to determine the need for an expansion of the convention center.

HVS, a global hospitality and consulting services firm, was one of seven qualified vendors to submit bids through the formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process.

"This is the first step in a long process to determine if we need to expand," said Starks. "We're turning away business because we simply don't have the space. We know the customer demand is there, but we need to take a closer look."

As outlined in the RFP, the objective of the study is to provide information to be considered when evaluating the need for expansion. The scope of information would include analysis and review of market trends, competitive facilities, hotel accommodations, and

meeting space.

The study would also provide insight on demand, type of space needed, and the potential economic impact of an expanded facility.

"Ultimately, the goal of any potential expansion would be to maximize the positive impact of the facility on the community and surrounding areas," Starks said. "That's our mission. That's why we're here."

Music City Center opened in May 2013. Since then, the 2.1 million square foot facility has hosted 2,534 events,

including 506 local nonprofit events, with an attendance record of 4.9 million people.

Proposals for the expansion feasibility study were reviewed by an internal evaluation committee. HVS was selected by the committee in August before being approved by the Music City Convention Center Authority.

The contract was awarded to HVS with participation from Younger Associates, a certified women's business enterprise.

Tax Hike

continued from page 1

Those funds will be allocated as follows: 75% will go toward tourism promotion in "direct funding to promote and/or foster the convention and/or tourism (visitor) development of Oklahoma City"; 13.3% will go towards event sponsorship; 6.7% will go towards fairgrounds improvement, but will not include operational costs;

and 5% will go to the convention center for improvements, but will not include operational costs.

The head of Visit Oklahoma City, Zac Craig, noted that almost 35,000 people in the city work in hospitality.

"I want to thank the citizens of OKC for voting in support of tourism and the vital role it plays in our community and economy," Craig said. "We've built a dynamic destination, and this increased funding allows us to attract

visitors that are the lifeblood of our districts, small businesses, hotels and attractions."

The last time the city increased the hotel occupancy tax rate was in 2004, according to the city's official website, when voters approved a 2% hotel tax increase to "promote conventions and tourism" in the Oklahoma City.

"Oklahoma City's hotel room tax helps our city thrive by attracting national conventions and sporting

events and providing support for our venues and visitor services," said City Manager Craig Freeman. "It's been 20 years since the tax was adjusted and 52 years since we've increased funding for tourism promotion. This update allows us to better keep pace with OKC's growth and our competitive peer set of destinations."

Representatives from the Oklahoma Hotel and Lodging Association did not return USAE requests for comment.

HOTS

HOTS Teddy Roosevelt's Stolen WHOTS Hot Seat... An annual tradition in Philadelphia likely left on-lookers a bit blind. The Associated Press reports that the 15th annual Philly Naked Bike Ride took place on August 24—though the ride used to be held in September. The annual ride began in 2009 and "is billed as promoting cycling as a key form of transportation and fuel-conscious consumption," AP said. Though ride participants are not required to bike

the 12-mile stretch naked, it is meant to encourage body positivity, and participants are encouraged to get "as bare as you dare." The ride changes course each year and spanned from Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, down the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, past City Hall to Rittenhouse Square, and through south Philly before heading north around the U.S. Mint and ending at a park near Drexel University. HOTS thinks this is a "wheel"y odd tradition but will roll with it anyway.



HOTS Lucky Strikes... A group of four Kentucky bowlers set a new Guinness World Record for bowling the most strikes in 24 hours. The group had a 24-hour bowling marathon on Labor Day at Lane One at Kingpin in Jeffersontown, Kentucky, that resulted in a collective 2,032 strikes within that time. The four bowlers—Steve Wiseman, Trace Wiseman, Kyle Reed and Erik Howard, all residents of Lou-



Commemorating Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September, Memphis' Renaissance Convention Center has unveiled a new series of art pieces by 12 patients from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Photo by ALSAC photography.

isville—only needed to reach 1,200 strikes to beat the record, and they bowled down any competition with their collective strikes. UPI reports that the quartet reached the 1,200 record

within 14 hours, but it continued to bowl strikes for the remaining 10 hours of the bowl-a-thon. HOTS wonders how much spare time these four have to beat the record so thunderously.

WEEKLY NEWS OF ASSOCIATIONS, CLUBS AND HOTELS

USAE

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR 1982 – 2021
Anne Daly Heller

PUBLISHER-EMERITUS
ROSS E. HELLER
ROSS@USAENEWS.COM

PUBLISHER
James Heller
james@usaenews.com

Creative Director
Diane Nichols
dkn@usaenews.com

MANAGING EDITOR
Jonathan Trager
jon@usaenews.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER AND ASSOCIATION EDITOR
Todd McElwee
todd@usaenews.com

HOTEL EDITOR
Jordan Bradley
jordan@usaenews.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Danielle Erbe
danielle@yespleasebrand.com

MARKETING & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Christy Pumphrey
christy@usaenews.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
George Roman
george@georgeromanmedia.com

NYC Casino-Hotel

continued from page 1

Related and Wynn said they have had "dozens" of meetings with "locals" over the last two years, which has influenced the proposal they've submitted to the New York Gaming Facility Location Board.

As part of the development, Wynn and Related have created a "neighborhood-focused traffic, safety, and sanitation plan" and intend to support local community organizations.

Should it be approved, the development would create 5,000 permanent union jobs and 35,000 union construction jobs during development, the companies said.

The project also includes the creation of the Wynn Neighborhood Improvement Fund, which would provide the resources for the community public safety, security and sanitation needs, "beautification and plantings for public open space and support

local artists," Wynn and Related said. The pair plan to release more details about the community benefits program next summer.

"It's easy for leaders to talk about wanting to create jobs and invest in the economy and infrastructure, but our proposal to develop Hudson Yards West would actually do it, which is why it continues to garner important support from unions, trade organizations and small businesses," said Bruce A. Beal Jr., President of Related.

In a June 27 meeting, the New York Gaming Facility Location Board voted unanimously to update the request for application schedule, moving the original deadline for proposals for the three new licenses from August 31, 2024 to June 27, 2025.

Following the close of application submissions, Community Advisory Committees will have until September 30, 2025 to vote on their respective projects, after which the committees will submit supplemental application

material to the board.

With the new timeline, the board said it "expects to make decisions by December 1, 2025, followed by commission licensure by December 31, 2025, to ensure that the state is able to collect casino license fees "ahead of schedule."

The updated timeline was changed to "ensure robust competition and community involvement," the board said, and each applicant is required to complete all entitlement processes before being considered.

"This timeline encompasses all legal requirements that potential bidders must meet before we may evaluate applications," said Vicki Been, Chair of the NY Gaming Facility Location Board. "This roadmap also gives communities ample opportunity to have their voices heard, establishes a level playing field among multiple competitors, and affords serious applicants the opportunity to participate in a lucrative and transformational process."

Online Tracking

continued from page 1

fore and after OCR forced the AHA to file its lawsuit—this rule was a gross overreach by the federal government, imposed without any input from health-care providers or the general public."

In *American Hospital Association v. Becerra*, AHA was joined by the Texas Hospital Association, Texas Health Resources, and United Regional Health Care System. Last November, the group sued HHS to bar enforcement of the new rule. On June 20, a federal

district court in the Northern District of Texas held that the OCR bulletin's new rule "was promulgated in clear excess of HHS's authority under HIPAA."

"It's easy for eyes to glaze over at a thirty-page opinion discussing the administrative esoterica accordant with HIPAA compliance," United States District Court Judge Mark Pittman wrote in the decision. "But this case isn't really about HIPAA, the Proscribed Combination, or the proper nomenclature for PHI in the Digital Age. Rather, this is a case about power... While the Proscribed Combination may be trivial

to HHS, it isn't for covered entities diligently attempting to comply with HIPAA's requirements."

AHA noted 17 state hospital associations and 30 hospitals and health systems filed friend-of-the-court briefs supporting AHA and its co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

"Now that the Bulletin's illegal rule has been vacated once and for all, hospitals can safely share reliable, accurate health care information with the communities they serve without the fear of federal civil and criminal penalties," Golder said.

To ensure publication, all Letters to the Editor must include a telephone number and mailing address in order to verify authenticity.

Complete copies of *USAE* are available for all paid subscribers online. Log onto <https://usaenews.com> and locate the log-in and password boxes. Specific log-in and password information is provided to subscribers via e-mail.

To receive another copy, please contact the paper's circulation department at (301) 986-8496 or via e-mail at christy@usaenews.com.

USAE (USPS 702-930, ISSN 0894-8194) is published weekly except the week of Christmas Day by CustomNEWS, Inc. Subscription rate is \$175/year; add \$65 in Canada and Mexico. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *USAE*, 6809 Delaware Street, Chevy Chase, MD 20815.

usaenews.com

CustomNEWS, Inc.
6809 Delaware Street
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

(301) 986-8496 • ©2022 by CustomNEWS, Inc.

NEWS

10,000 Hotel Workers Strike Over Labor Day Weekend

By Jordan Bradley

As part of nationwide action, approximately 10,000 hotel workers walked off the job over Labor Day weekend in eight major cities amid stalled contract negotiations.

On September 1, workers at 24 hotels in Boston; San Francisco, San Diego and San Jose, California; Seattle; Honolulu and Kauai, Hawaii; and Greenwich, Connecticut, began the Labor Day weekend strike.

On September 2, 200 workers at the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland, joined the strike, according to Unite Here, the hospitality union organizing the strikes.

The strike included front-desk staff, housekeepers and other hotel employees. The strike occurred as hotel workers and hotel management are unable to come to terms on new contracts with workers calling for higher wages, better benefits, changes to staffing and workloads.

“We wouldn’t have a day to rest, relax, and enjoy the fruits of the labor movement if our union predecessors hadn’t stood up to fight for them—but that fight’s not over,” said Gwen Mills, International President of Unite Here. “This Labor Day, hotel workers across the U.S. are celebrating Labor Day by fighting for raises, fair workloads, and the reversal of COVID-era service and staffing cuts.”

Hotels included in the strike were the DoubleTree by Hilton Seattle Airport, the Hilton Seattle Airport & Conference Center and the Westin Seattle in Washington State; the DoubleTree by Hilton and Signia by Hilton in San Jose; the Hilton San Diego Bayfront; the Grand Hyatt SFO, Grand Hyatt Union Square, Hilton Union Square,

Westin St. Francis and the Palace Hotel in San Francisco; the Sheraton Kauai Resort in Kauai; the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach, The Royal Hawaiian, Sheraton Princess Kaiulani, Sheraton Waikiki, Waikiki Beach Marriott, and the Westin Moana Surfrider in Honolulu; the Hyatt Regency Greenwich in Greenwich; and the Fairmont Copley Plaza, Hampton Inn & Homewood Suites by Hilton Boston Seaport, Hilton Boston Logan Airport and Hilton Boston Park Plaza in Boston.

Strikes have also been authorized “and could begin at any time” in New Haven, Connecticut; Oakland, California; and Providence, Rhode Island, the union said.

Michael D’Angelo, Head of Labor Relations for the Americas at Hyatt, said the hotel chain was

“disappointed” by the union’s choice to strike.

Hyatt “remains willing to continue bargaining in good faith,” D’Angelo added.

“We have a history of offering competitive wages and benefits in each market, including comprehensive health care at little to no cost, as well as retirement savings,” D’Angelo said via a statement to USAE. “We have offered competitive wages, health care and retirement benefits at the hotels that are on strike at this time, and colleague benefits and wages remain unchanged as we negotiate a new agreement.”

D’Angelo noted that Hyatt looks forward to continuing to negotiate with Unite Here and Hyatt hotels have “contingency plans in place to minimize impact on hotel operations.”

A banquet server in San Jose said she works four part-time jobs to make



Hotel workers at the DoubleTree by Hilton and the Signia by Hilton in San Jose, California, walked off the job on strike on September 1 as part of a nationwide strike coordinated by Unite Here.

ends meet.

“Going on strike is a huge sacrifice, but it’s something I have to do for my family. Right now, we don’t have health insurance because my employers won’t give me hours,” said Concepción Marquez, who has worked at the Signia by Hilton and the Marriott San Jose for 21 years, according to the Union. “We told the bosses in our negotiations how hard things are for us right now, but they didn’t care.”

Mills said the strike comes as an effort to right the hotel industry post-Covid. The union cites data from STR in its argument for improved contracts for hotel workers, which notes that in 2022 hotel revenue in United States “reached an all-time high.”

“Ten thousand hotel workers across the U.S. are on strike because the hotel industry has gotten off track,” said Mills. “During COVID, everyone

suffered, but now the hotel industry is making record profits while workers and guests are left behind... We won’t accept a ‘new normal’ where hotel companies profit by cutting their offerings to guests and abandoning their commitments to workers.”

As of September 4, approximately 700 hotel workers at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront remained on “an open-ended strike,” according to Unite Here, and the remaining workers participating in the Labor Day weekend strike have returned to work follow two- to three-day strikes.

Unite Here “warned travelers that the labor dispute is ongoing” in the aforementioned cities, and said, “Continued picketing and other disruptions are possible.”

A travel guide and labor dispute map is available at unitehere.org.



Hilton New York Times Square has announced the continuation of a partnership with Disney Theatrical Group with the debut of THE LION KING’s Royal Suite. Curated by one of Broadway’s top dressing room designers, Devin Sparkles Design, the immersive suite draws inspiration from Disney’s award-winning THE LION KING on Broadway.

Stay Connected

twitter.com/usaenews

NEWS

PCMA Announces 2025 Directors and Trustees Slate

By Todd McElwee

The roster of volunteer leaders ready to guide PCMA and the PCMA Foundation in 2025 has been released, with Neil Brownlee, Head of Business Events, VisitScotland, set to serve as Chair.

VisitScotland noted Brownlee was the first non-North American chair elect as he prepared to take the post for 2024.

The PCMA Board includes directors and trustees for PCMA and the PCMA Foundation. The association said members represent a globally diverse community who support the association’s mission to drive global economic and social transformation through business events.

Sherrif Karamat, CAE, PCMA and CEMA President and CEO, said: “PCMA is the platform for the global business events community. “The proposed Board slate embodies diversity of thought and range of experience essential to our work to lead significant and positive change throughout the world.”

Kelly Ricker, Chief Learning Officer, American Academy of Neurology, will serve as Chair-Elect. Leonard Hoops, President & CEO, Visit Indy, transitions to Immediate Past Chair. Upon PCMA membership approval Robin Preston, CEM, DES, Managing Director, Events, The American Institute of Architects,



Neil Brownlee

will become secretary-treasurer.

Gary Murakami, CMP Fellow, CMM, DES, Vice President of Global Sales and Industry Relations, Teneo Hospitality Group, CEMA Advisory Board Chair, will begin serving a one-year director and trustee term.

The slate can be deemed confirmed by PCMA members at close of business October 1. Directors and trustees will assume office immediately following PCMA’s Convening Leaders, January 12–15, at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston.

Find the complete roster at pcma.org.

Portland Airport

continued from page 1

nature of the transformed terminal. While capacity has doubled, energy usage per square foot has been reduced by half.

In addition, 49 skylights are nestled in the ceiling, which itself was cut from the Pacific Northwest forest using sustainable harvesting methods.

“Transparent sourcing had never been achieved at this scale before,” the Port of Portland stated. “It took six years of collaboration with sustainable forestry pros, multigenerational foresters, and mills who were all motivated to do the work in a way that balances ecological and economic

values.”

The storefronts—which include 15 new brands and eight returning ones—are clustered together along tree-lined streets, with café seating spilling onto patios.

Jeff Miller, President & CEO of Travel Portland, said they’re “thrilled with the evolution of the Portland International Airport and know travelers will continue to rank it as one of the best in the entire country.”

“PDX is the first and last impression for many of our visitors and the renovation of the main terminal is certain to make it a positive one,” Miller said. “PDX is a shining star in our city’s tourism assets and we often refer to it as one of the city’s best neighborhoods.”



The revamped main terminal in the Portland International Airport opened recently. The terminal’s nature-infused interior emphasizes the values of health, wellbeing, and safety.

Have you seen our new website?

Don't miss the Top Story, Photos of the Week, Industry Movers and more!

Stay in the know. Visit us today!



NEWS

IMEX America's Learning Program Goes Live

By Todd McElwee

IMEX America's learning program is now live online. Organizers said the catalogue is designed to educate and entertain the global business event community, from seasoned veterans to first-timers, with 150-plus sessions on tap.

All professional education at IMEX America is provided free of charge, including the show's specialist events for association, corporate and agency planners taking place on Smart Monday, powered by MPI, October 7.

Tahira Endean, Head of Programming at IMEX, said: "We're out and about talking to our community all the time – we want to put ourselves in our attendees' shoes to figure out what will resonate and enhance their show experience. What I love to do when crafting our learning program is to bring together unexpected combinations of people, all with a range

of perspectives. The resulting debate and discovery is where the magic happens."

Learning sessions are delivered across seven tracks: technology and innovation; business practices, impact, trends/research, well-being, experience design and the increasingly popular event marketing. A series of sessions will take place on the show floor's newly redesigned, multi-theater Inspiration Hub.

Highlighted sessions include Justin Wren—also an MPI keynote speaker at the show—an American mixed martial artist who, following a life-changing trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo, founded Fight for the Forgotten. The nonprofit provides clean water, education, and empowerment to Pygmy communities in Africa. Holly Ransom will deliver a new Emergent Leadership Day where industry leaders from associations and across the city of Las Vegas will examine leadership from different angles.



Tahira Endean

"My passion is how to close the 'knowing and doing gap'—how do we help people not just to explore ideas but put them to work practically," Ran-

som said. "Whether that's individuals improving their own leadership or collectively building a stronger leadership culture."

Skift is bringing back its Innovation Lab with a new partnership with the Unique Speakers Bureau International that brings together more than 15 top level speakers from around the world to Smart Monday.

Intending to help attendees maximize their time at the show, IMEX said it is continuing its work with Snapsight, Gevme's AI powered tool, to provide quick and easy access to takeaways from the education sessions.

"These highlights, available online and via the app, will free up attendees to put aside their notebooks and be fully present and focused in the sessions," IMEX said.

IMEX America 2024 will be held at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas from October 8–10. Smart Monday, powered by MPI, is October 7. More information is can be found at imexamerica.com.

Denver Campaign Targets Residents to Consider an Industry Career

By Jonathan Trager

Visit Denver has announced "Boredom is Fired," an initiative highlighting the career opportunities in tourism, leisure, and hospitality geared toward high school-age students and young adults.

Announced on September 4, the campaign features the benefits of working in the industry such as good starting pay, skills development, career advancement, and flexibility. The effort showcases ambassadors working in attractions, events, hotels, elsewhere who share their stories of the opportunities for personal and professional growth in the industry.

The campaign includes an outreach program to secondary education in-

stitutions and skills-based programs where Visit Denver representatives and workforce development ambassadors will speak directly to students. These ambassadors, who work across industry sectors, are featured in videos that share their stories.

"We know investing in young people and helping them get job experience that they will enjoy is essential to the future success of the travel and hospitality industry," said Richard Scharf, President & CEO of Visit Denver. "We are so grateful to our local hospitality business owners, educators, industry associations and city leadership for their support of workforce development during this important time in the industry."

"Boredom is Fired" is a result of years of industry research and strategic planning with Visit Denver's board of directors, local educators, industry associations, and city leadership, as well as conversations with hospitality business owners, on the importance of an engaged, talented, and motivated workforce.

The campaign is part of Visit Denver's Workforce Development initiative, which was initiated when the organization's partners and the board shared concerns of a shrinking workforce pool in the industry, the one that was hardest hit during the pandemic and still struggles with staffing shortages.

The U.S. travel and tourism indus-

try experienced a 51% rise in new job postings in Q12024 compared with the previous quarter, according to Hotel Management Network. The campaign is "designed to help fill these positions and support businesses while uplifting students in a fun and exciting industry," according to Visit Denver.

The "Boredom is Fired" campaign complements Visit Denver's ongoing efforts in supporting students and young professionals with their career goals. The Visit Denver Foundation has been awarding scholarships for hospitality programs at Colorado universities, colleges, and trade schools since 2000.

To learn more about the campaign, visit boredomisfired.com.



Destination DC held its Marketing Outlook Meeting on August 27 at the Washington Hilton. The nation's capital welcomed a record-breaking 25.95 million total visitors in 2023, up 17 percent from 2022 and surpassing the pre-pandemic record set in 2019. More than 600 people, including D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, local officials, and key figures from the tourism and hospitality industry were in attendance.